

Executive Summary/Project Abstract

TIP: Do this section last!

The executive summary, or abstract, is the single most important part of the grant proposal. It can be anywhere from several lines to a full page in length. This summary should be both succinct and complete.

Develop this component of the grant proposal by summarizing the main points of all the other sections. Begin by outlining each of the proposal sections and use that outline to develop a concise and compelling summary.

Many grantmakers provide forms with explicit directions for presenting the executive summary. These forms often limit the amount of space and number of words you can use. Always carefully follow the directions on these forms.

Here's a sample executive summary that provides you with a clear idea of how this section should read:

The Preventer Fire Safety Project combines health promotion training for members of the AmeriCorps network with a pilot smoke detector and fire safety training project. Four communities from Bracken County, located in southwestern Alabama, will participate in the project. All communities are rural, with an average 31% of the population living below the poverty level.

There are two primary target groups: AmeriCorps network members and children eligible for Head Start programs in the four participating communities. However, the region's demographics and the nature of the project suggest that the majority population in each community will benefit. The combined population of these communities is 4,753 people.

The project has been formulated to address a leading problem in southern Alabama: fire-related deaths. Alabama is second in the nation for the highest rate of death per 1,000 house fires, and Bracken County has the highest mortality rate in Alabama for children ages 0-4. The Preventer Fire Safety Project will launch a region-wide smoke-detector installation campaign.

This executive summary goes on to summarize the campaign, the coalition that has come together to launch this program, the amount requested, and how much money has already been raised.

When writing the executive summary, you are trying to accomplish two things:

1. Create curiosity for the reader.
2. Establish credibility for the organization.

Why create curiosity?

Usually, you can't have a face-to-face discussion with the readers, so you need to find a way to draw them into the conversation - make them curious about what you are doing and why

you feel compelled to do it. Your proposed project will have a greater impact on them once they become engaged.

Here are a few ways to build curiosity in the executive summary:

- Provocative questions will draw the reader into the prose. A brief, interrogative statement, such as, “Why are there so many house-fire-related deaths?” makes people stop and wonder.
- Sharing just enough information to make the readers want to know more is always a good way to engage them in the longer, more detailed statement of need and project description.
- Provide a glimpse of how you will address and hopefully solve the problem. Don’t tell them too much - just enough for them to be intrigued.
- If you can, use the fact that others are supporting this project to enhance interest. For example, use language like “community momentum to address this problem” or similar powerful phrases to let the reader know there is a movement to address the issue.

Establishing your credibility doesn’t need to be relegated to its own paragraph. In fact, it is better if you lace the executive summary with brief statements that reinforce that you are the right organization to be doing this project, and that you have all the resources (except the funding) to do it.

In the following few paragraphs you will see that we summarize the situation, draw in the reader (the brief question), and establish credibility.

*Since 1947, the Greater Kanawa Historical Society has served as the guardian of our community’s heritage, recording our ancestors, cataloging events – both past and present, and serving as a repository for our regional culture. But over the past decade this rich community story met an unexpected adversary.
Who was this adversary?*

Climate. Weather. Call it what you will, but it is the one element from which our history has not been protected. This repository of letters, photos, and documents of many types is literally crumbling from the hot and humid climate of this southern community. It will take up to three-years to properly build and install all the necessary climate controls so that the history of this wonderful region of our country is not lost forever.

Of course, the executive summary goes on to cover several other points, but in the opening paragraph, creating curiosity will get the readers’ attention and establishing organizational credibility will make readers trust that yours is the right organization to address this particular problem.

One quick tip about writing the summary. I usually ask someone, not involved with the proposed project, to read the grant proposal. After they read the proposal, I take it away and ask them to write a summary of what the problem or need is that we are trying to address, and what we propose to do. This exercise often provides a perspective on whether what I wrote in the proposal is clear, and it also offers new language to describe the proposed project in the summary.

Follow these steps when drafting your summary:

Step One: Summarize the problem of need in two or three sentences.

Step Two: Summarize the goal(s) and objectives in a narrative form - don't list them.

Step Three: In two or three sentences, summarize your proposed plan of action, don't list methods but do mention the timeline (beginning and ending dates). Don't forget to mention the evaluation plan.

Step Four: Summarize your dollar request: how much you have raised, how much you need from this source, and your total budget for this project.

Step Five: Explain why this funding source is best for your project - make a connection between your organization's mission and the mission of this funding source (or the goal of this project and the goal of the grantmaker).